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MAR 14 1935
Wednesday, March 13, 1935.

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Subject: "SPRING GARDEN FOODS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics,
U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

I feel in the mood today to talk about the fresh spring vegetables coming on the market. I don't need to remark that they're refreshing to look at -- sometimes will revive the appetite at just a glance. Nor that they're delicious in flavor, if properly prepared. Nor that they're full of good values like the well-known minerals and vitamins that help to keep us going -- and cheerful.

You know all these facts. But what some of us don't know is another side-light on the character of spring vegetables -- the quality that they lack. They lack patience. They won't sit in your kitchen and wait patiently until you get around to cook them. Not they. If you bring them home from market or in from your garden and leave them on the kitchen table for a few hours, why they'll just wilt under the strain. They'll grow limp and flabby or tasteless and anemic or stringy. They demand immediate attention and the right environment or they'll begin to lose their best qualities. Now you know that many of the sturdy late-fall vegetables are willing to wait around all day. Take a calm, comfortable souf like the Hubbard squash, for example. A big winter squash won't mind sitting several days in the kitchen before you look after it. And sweetpotatoes -- they're actually at their best waiting in a warm room. But not the spring vegetables. Not crisp spring greens. And not tender asparagus. And not fresh green onions. No, these fresh green foods need prompt attention. They have to be kept in a cool place. You see, most of them are very delicate in structure -- lots of juice with a very light framework, so to speak. So they bruise easily, wilt easily and age quickly. The only way to keep them fresh and crisp is to keep them in a chilly, slightly damp environment.

Take greens, for example -- any spring greens, dandelion greens, beet tops, turnip tops, cress and so on. Well, we all know that the young, tender, crisp greens taste best. Whether you cook them as potherbs or eat them raw in salad, the fresh plants are the most delicious. So, as soon as the greens come into your kitchen, look after them. If you aren't going to cook or serve them at once, put them away where they'll stay fresh. First, wash them very carefully but thoroughly. Be careful not to bruise the leaves as you wash them. Discard any wilted, yellow or damaged leaves. Then shake the greens gently in a towel to remove any excess moisture. Then put them in a covered container and set them in the refrigerator. They'll keep fresh for several days this way until you want to use them.

The tender tips of garden asparagus will stay fresh if you care for them the same way. Untie the bunch as soon as it comes from the market. Wash each stalk carefully and remove those little scales down the side. Sand or dirt has a way of hiding under those scales. The specialists suggest breaking rather than cutting off the tough ends. Why? Because if the stalk breaks off clean, that's a sure sign it's crisp and tender. Save the tough ends for soup. But put the green tender tips in a flat pan or dish, cover the dish, and set it in the refrigerator until you are ready to cook the asparagus. See that no moisture clings to the tips of asparagus, because these become soft quickly.

About those fresh young onions. They need to stay crisp, too. But if you put them in the ice-box, better wrap them closely in waxed paper or cover them very tightly. Otherwise other foods in the refrigerator may take on an onion taste or odor.

Well, it all comes down to about this -- the best way to care for these impatient spring foods is to wash and prepare them as soon as they come into the kitchen and then keep them in a closed container in the ice box. Treat them gently during cleaning. Don't let them stand and soak in water. This will help prevent spoilage and save both looks and flavor. What's more, this arrangement means convenience. Your vegetables are all ready when you want them to pop into the kettle or use raw in salad.

By the way, now and then tender green vegetables freeze in the refrigerator. Better not place them too close to the ice compartment. Reserve that coldest shelf in the refrigerator just for milk or meat.

I talked about cooking greens only the other day, but now I've had several requests for a recipe for cooking dandelion greens. I can tell you two good ways to fix these greens. Be sure to get the very young tender plants. Older plants have a bitter taste. And be sure to wash and pack over the greens carefully. Now you're ready to cook them. Drop the greens in a very small amount of boiling lightly salted water. Cook until just tender. Drain. Season with onion juice and a little lemon juice or vinegar, and butter, salt and pepper.

Many people like hot wilted dandelions. Wash the tender leaves and mix them with hot cooked salad dressing. Arrange on a plate, and sprinkle crisp chopped bacon over the top. Serve at once.

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